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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM EG KWBG IS

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN EMBASSY ALLEGES YA'ALON COMMENT INDICATES
GOI INTENT TO STRIP ARABS OF POLITICAL RIGHTS

REF: TEL AVIV 1220

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Egyptian DCM Sameh El Souefi briefed members of the diplomatic community including Pol Couns May 28 on the May 24-25 visit of MFA spokesman and director of Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit's office Hossam Zaki. El Souefi provided a readout along predictable lines of Zaki's discussions with Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, Minister for Strategic Issues Moshe Ya'alon, National Security Adviser Uzi Arad, and opposition leader Tzipi Livni. El Souefi then directed the briefing toward Egyptian concerns over the Netanyahu government's insistence that the Palestinian Authority recognize Israel as a Jewish state, which he asserted serves as cover for a plan to disenfranchise Israel's Arab minority.

¶2. (C) El Souefi took a comment made to Zaki by Moshe Ya'alon and presented it as a new GOI plan to disenfranchise Israeli Arabs. Ya'alon reportedly told Zaki that non-Jewish minorities in Israel should enjoy full civil rights but should "not seek the expression of their national identity" within Israel since "they have other options" to fulfill that need. El Souefi then went on to discuss the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 and the UNGA's Resolution 181, which he said had forced the first Israeli government to call Israel a Jewish state and not a state for the Jews if Israel wanted UN membership. El Souefi said the Netanyahu government's insistence on referring to two states for two peoples is directly linked to a plan to strip Israeli Arabs of their political rights. El Souefi called the alleged new policy "smart transfer" since the GOI recognizes it cannot kick out all the Israeli Arabs, but can instead take away their political rights. He quoted various Israeli Arab intellectuals as having validated his theory.

¶3. (C) Pol Couns countered that there were other interpretations of the "Israel is a Jewish state" issue, pointing out that Livni and Olmert had raised the issue at Annapolis but dropped it when Abu Mazen refused to discuss it, and adding that the Israelis say it is necessary to raise it in the context of negotiations with the Palestinians when it was not raised in peace negotiations with Jordan and Egypt because of the right of return. El Souefi responded by agreeing that the "smart transfer" concept was an Egyptian interpretation of the GOI's policy, but said that even if it was untrue, it was believed by many Israeli Arabs. He went on to express alarm at the draft legislation seeking to criminalize denying Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state (see reftel).

¶4. (C) Comment. Egyptian-Israeli relations appear to us increasingly stove-piped between a serious and productive dialogue on Gaza and security issues that is conducted by Intelligence Minister Soliman and the Egyptian General Intelligence Service with the Israeli Ministry of Defense and Mossad, and a separate diplomatic channel that has a tendency to get mired in unhelpful rhetoric. El Souefi's briefing to

the diplomatic community struck us as an example of the latter. Despite some efforts by right wing legislators to introduce various bills aimed at pressuring Israel's Arab minority to stop challenging the state's Jewish and Zionist identity, we doubt that the Netanyahu government is considering action to strip Arabs of their political rights, nor do we think the Knesset and the High Court of Justice would allow such action to get very far even if the GOI attempted to do so. We welcome Embassy Cairo's sense of whether this briefing represented a local initiative by the Egyptian Embassy or a new Egyptian campaign against the GOI's decision to elevate the issue of Israel's Jewish identity.

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